

Music Books and Sociability

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In the opening essay of his 1992 collection, *The Order of Books*, Roger Chartier drew attention to the way that studies of the *histoire du livre* might fail to give an adequate account of the cultural function of early modern books by ignoring two interrelated aspects of the act of reading itself: first, that reading is an embodied practice and second, that it is a social one. Chartier recalled that 'Reading is not uniquely an abstract operation of the intellect: it brings the body into play, it is inscribed in a space and a relationship with oneself and with others', going on to propose that 'special attention should be paid' to one crucial aspect of early modern reading practice that has largely disappeared in the contemporary world – 'reading aloud'. Chartier pointed out that reading aloud served two functions, one of them 'communicating the written word to those who are unable to decipher it themselves' and the other, that it 'cement[s] the interlocking forms of sociability that are emblematic of private life in the intimacy of the family circle, in worldly conviviality, and in literary circles and spheres of scholarly sociability'.¹ In another essay, specifically devoted to the topic, Chartier noted that the question of reading aloud 'finds itself situated at an intersection of several histories': those concerned with 'works and genres'; those which pertain to 'modes of circulation of writing' and finally, 'forms of sociability and intimacy'.²

Reading aloud was commonplace in the early modern period; indeed, it quite possibly was the predominant mode in which books were experienced, even by readers alone in complete privacy: truly silent reading 'without moving the lips' was still a specialized accomplishment.³ And although by the sixteenth century solitary reading (whether aloud or silent) was increasingly practised by highly-educated readers as a form of retreat from public life, the reading of books may well far more often have been done in company by one person for the benefit of the others.⁴ Indeed, Roger Chartier writes that 'reading aloud, [although] no longer a necessity for the reader', was 'an exercise in sociability on any number of occasions and to diverse ends'.⁵

Meanwhile, in the ground-breaking collection of essays, *Music and the Cultures of Print*, assembled and edited by Kate van Orden in 2000, a number of music historians showed decisively the great potential that is opened up by exploring musical materials in the light of developments elsewhere in the field of the *histoire du livre* and the broader ideas embraced by the term ‘print culture’. For example, Chartier’s call for students of socio-bibliography to focus on the ‘tenuous materiality of the printed book’ was seen by one of the contributors to the collection, Katherine Bergeron, as an encouragement to music historians to

expand our view of the text to reconsider its authority in terms of not only *what* but also *how* it represents – to think not of pure ‘readings’ but of actual readers – and thus to account for the role played by the print medium in the reading process, the ways in which the physical text and its notation can enlarge our comprehension of the music itself.⁶

What strikes me here most forcefully, is not so much Bergeron’s appeal to consider the performative dimension of reading (persuasive though it is), but rather her conception of the ultimate ‘goal’ of such an approach, expressed at the end of her sentence – ‘comprehension of the music itself’. This suggests that the underlying agenda of such a process of understanding ‘readings’, returns, as it continues to do so in so much contemporary musicology whether ‘new’ or ‘old’, to an epistemology of the primacy of music objects that are, ultimately, bearers of inherent meanings. It is an agenda which Carolyn Abbate, in her provocative counter-posing of ‘drastic’ with traditional ‘gnostic’ forms of musicology, referred to as ‘searching for immanent supra-audible contents in musical artefacts from the past’.⁷

In this light, consider the fact that the predominant group of ‘readers’ of sixteenth-century musical materials were (and probably still are), of course, performers, and the *raison d’être* of musical reading processes remains primarily – notwithstanding certain important exceptions – the animation of acts of musical performance. Such ‘readings’ of musical materials are thus almost always ‘readings aloud’ of a spectacular and physiologically dynamic variety – ‘embodied readings’ *par excellence*. If meanings are made not by writers but by readers (and if musicians are reading polyphonic music texts, then this means groups of co-readers, as well as their listeners), then investigations of musical texts informed by an acknowledgement of the implications of this fact might have the potential at least, to allow musicologists to break out of the circle that seems always to lead inexorably back to ‘the music itself’. Instead, it can suggest directing attention to other sorts of meanings manifested in the acts of performance which

musical texts, through their incarnation as material instruments (that is, music books) both engender and facilitate and so to the wider contexts – cultural and social – in which such acts of performance are not only embedded, but which they also help to construct.

The philosopher, Christopher Small, has famously proposed a paradigm for just such a conception of musical meanings, seeing them as residing not in the abstract discourses of the notational texts of the musical objects themselves, but rather in the relationships that exist between those ‘who take part in any capacity in a musical performance, whether by performing or by listening’, which he famously encapsulated in the neologism ‘musicking’.⁸ His insistence that music is a process rather than a thing is the linchpin of his wider thesis, that when a society of any size ‘musicks’, it confirms and celebrates its collective identity. Small’s deconstructions of the thick textures of scenes of musicking thus feed back into understanding the discursive structures and relations in which music making is embedded.

In directing our attention away from musical objects (‘works’) and onto the conditions and interactions of musical performance (‘musickings’), Christopher Small’s idea echoes Chartier’s thesis, which I referred to earlier, that reading is not simply ‘an abstract operation of the intellect’, but is ‘a practice embodied in acts, spaces, and habits’. In elaboration of this quality of embodiment, Chartier specifically draws attention to the fact that ‘Readers and hearers ... are never confronted with abstract or ideal texts detached from all materialities ... a text, stable in its letter, is invested with a new meaning and status when the mechanisms that make it available to interpretation change’.⁹ The material formats that mediate the mechanisms for the realisation of ‘abstract’ musical compositions as performances (embodied readings) – for example in the principle focus of this essay, sixteenth century ensemble song – are likewise critical motors of the ‘instabilities’ out of which the performers create ‘new meaning and status’ for musical texts in the course of their acts of musicking.

Considered in terms of the history of the role of written materials in the process of performance of music in the West, the phenomenon of manuscript and print publication of polyphonic music in part-book format could be ranked as a particular kind of ‘materialisation’ of musical texts as momentous in its way, perhaps, as the move to the very writing down of polyphonic music in the first place. The specific style of materialisation which the choice of part-book format represents, especially in the universally standardised printed form it acquired so soon after the development of printing from moveable type (Chartier’s ‘mechanisms that make it

available to interpretation'), can be, I suggest, no less decisive in the construction of certain kinds of sociability through music as other physical variables, including the acoustical, mechanical and architectural parameters of specific performance occasions.

It is significant that recent approaches to the study, curating and display in museums of furnishings and other domestic material objects from, for example, the sixteenth century Italian aristocratic and bourgeois *casa*, has turned to a similar conception of materiality and to a consideration of how such objects can be understood as critical to the construction and articulation of its particular kinds of social exchanges and rituals, including eating and drinking, conversation and the playing of games, and, not insignificantly – the making of music. In the course of the sixteenth century, musical instruments and music books, specifically sets of part-books, became indispensable furnishings of the *casa*, alongside decorative hangings, tableware and games.¹⁰

To summarize: where both bibliographical history on one hand, and critical and analytical studies of music on the other, in their various ways depend on an abstraction of musical texts from their productive milieu, we might instead focus on re-inserting music books into the cultural and spatial environments where they became (and, of course still can continue to become) operative as generators of readings (and therefore of 'musicings'), and on their very materiality as they act as articulators of sociability. In the remainder of this essay I sample evidence from three bodies of sources – pictorial, literary, and music-notational – to propose ways in which to broaden out the historiography of sixteenth-century music books in order to begin to account for their 'active materiality'. This involves, as I have outlined above, harnessing the concepts of a 'socio-bibliographic' methodology of print culture and history-of-reading studies; the performance-oriented epistemology of 'drastic musicology'; and the socio-environmental and spatial concerns of material culture studies, bringing them all variously to bear on the question of the role of music as both metaphor and artefact in the sociable dimensions of everyday life.

Images of musical sociability



Fig. 1 Andrea Antico, *Canzoni nove* (1510), Frontispiece

The well-known frontispiece woodcut in Andrea Antico's *Canzoni nove* (Fig. 1), published in 1510, captures a number of the qualities of the particular kind of sociability brought into existence when a group of people use musical materials to help articulate a relatively intimate act of recreational musicking. Here, rather than having individual part books, the singers share a single volume (the *Canzoni nove* is printed in choirbook format so all four voice parts are laid out across one opening, two on each page, one above the other). The woodcut shows both the intense concentration and the dynamism of the four singers of varying ages, as they huddle together in close physical proximity, turned in towards one another, oblivious to us, the viewers (and listeners).¹¹ Physical contact between the four men of varying ages is pronounced, and apparently integral to the success of their collective performance; each is animated: the man on the right has his finger raised in gesture while the figure on the left may be tapping the tempo on

the shoulder of the bald man in the centre, whose spectacles draw attention to the fact that all are engaged in reading from the book as they sing. Although the book is being held by this man in the middle, the young man in the front (perhaps a boy singing the cantus?) also lays his hand on it, pulling the page back so he can read his part over the top. The music book gives them the words and notes for their song, but it is also the material object – small though it is – that pulls them together, defining their physical relationships just as it also structures their singing through its textuality and layout on the page.

Antico's print shows an all male group, but collective music-making also often provided one of the few opportunities for men and women to encounter each other as equals and in close physical proximity, as in this illustration of a mixed group making music together in the altogether more refined surroundings of Hans Vredeman de Vries's famous idealized representation of courtly *otium* (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Hans Vredeman de Vries, Palastarchitektur mit Muzierenden (c. 1596) Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum. Reproduced with permission

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A close-up view of the musicians sitting at the table on the extreme left of the picture (Fig. 3) shows that the young man in the centre of the group is leaning across the woman in the foreground as he reads from the same part book, casually placing the fingers of his right hand on her shoulder while with his left hand he holds the page of another book open for the flute player. Again, the part books as physical objects are as critically integral to organizing the embodied sociabilities being enacted, as are the table and chairs.



: Fig. 3. Hans Vredeman de Vries, *Palastarchitektur mit Muzierenden*, c. 1596 Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, detail. Reproduced with permission

In the next scene (Fig. 4), a woodcut from Hans Sachs' and Jost Amman's well-known *Ständebuch* ('Book of Trades') entitled 'The Singers', we see three mixed, elegantly-dressed couples sitting around a table under a canopy in a garden.¹² The enclosed outdoor setting and their body language tells us that they are most likely singing amorous songs, and the volumes on the table suggest, too, that we may be dropping in on an extended session of intimate musicking (indeed the fourth part-book, Bassus, lies unopened at the front of the table, perhaps inviting the

viewer to take a seat and join in). All are concentrating intensely on their reading, while the couple in the foreground is clearly physically animated as they sing – she perhaps keeping the pulse with her right hand while he points out the notes on the page. In each pair, the man has an arm around his female partner, and each couple shares a book – which does beg the question of who is actually singing which voice part. Nevertheless, the music books again play a direct role in defining the singers' physical interactions with one another, no less than the spatial constrictions of the table and *loggia*.¹³



Fig. 4 Jost Amman, Die Singer (1568). Woodcut from Hans Sachs, *Eygentliche Beschreibung aller Stände auff Erden, hoher und nidriger, geistlicher und weltlicher, aller Künsten, Handwercken und Händeln* (Frankfurt am Main: Sigmund Feyerabend, 1568), sig. civ

Finally, an image of bourgeois domestic musicking, this time from the first half of the seventeenth century (Fig. 5). Abraham Bosse's famous image of Hearing ('Les plaisirs de la musique') from his series depicting the Five Senses shows a delightful scene of what may well be a family performing together. The carefully rendered perspective of the interior setting draws our attention to the roles of the furnishings in the physical organization of this lively moment of domestic musicking. A pair of quite large musical instruments (lute and viola da gamba), a circular table and its chairs and stools, as well as the sets of part-books in their oblong octavo layout, each contributes to the careful ordering of the space and the interactions of the performers. The table surface is deftly negotiated by the two instrumentalists, so that they can both play and still remain in close proximity with one another; their part books lie open flat on the table while the singers hold their copies up, perhaps to make more space, but also the better to be able to read, sing and engage in visual contact, all at the same time.



Fig 5. Abraham Bosse, 'Les plaisirs de la musique' (c1637).

Bosse's scene is, of course, also an allegory of bourgeois order: the harmonious ensemble sits in a well-ordered room on whose back wall hang tapestries depicting unharmonious scenes of war, albeit idealized and contained within decorative art works. The text of the song, its opening identifiable from the part book from which the viola da gamba player reads, shows that they are engaged in performing an amorous *air de cour*, 'Cloris de quoi te sert... de me voulloir...', their musicking thus proposing a model of pastoral social order, that is broadcast beyond the confines of the room through the open window to the city beyond.¹⁴ But the success of the image rests primarily on its verisimilitude: the playing positions of the two instrumentalists are carefully studied and rendered, while the facial expressions of all the participants capture both the intense concentration needed to interpret and articulate the notation in real time, and the pleasure that arises when their coordinated readings from several different books produces a successful performance. But such an outcome depends precisely on the social skills and attendant values which Bosse's image celebrates, including not only mastery of the finer points of civilized interaction and physical decorum, but most importantly, the necessary musical skill that allows such collective reading to function.

Sight-singing and sociability

On the opening page of his monumental *Plaine and Easie Introduction to the Skill of Musicke*, published in 1597, Thomas Morley offered a fictionalized cautionary tale that, like much effective advertising, plays on anxieties about social inadequacy of the potential purchasers. The scene is set at that quintessential location for the enactment and celebration of bourgeois codes of social interaction and for the testing of aspirants for membership – a fashionable London dinner party. The young candidate, Philomathes, having more or less successfully negotiated the challenges of the dinner-table conversation that had almost revealed his ignorance of music, might perhaps have been feeling quietly confident of acceptance into his hosts' milieu.¹⁵ But at this moment disaster strikes, as he is subjected to a clearly unexpected final test, and his utter humiliation at failing it:

supper being ended, and Musicke books, according to the custom being brought to the table: the mistress of the house presented me with a part, earnestly requesting me to sing. But when after many excuses, I protested unfaindly that I could not: every one began to wonder. Yea, some whispered to others, demanding how I was brought up.¹⁶

The story of Philomathes taps, of course, into Baldassare Castiglione's trope of the musical accomplishments of the ideal courtier, famously set out in *Il Cortegiano*, and it conveys the same sense of anxiety that pervades the passages in Castiglione which deal with the social exposure of various kinds of performances, including musical ones. Indeed, Morley's tale reveals plenty about the relationship between certain musical skills and class. Thus, Philomathes's current ineligibility fully to enter the group to which he aspires for membership is probably confirmed even before he is forced to admit that he cannot read music at sight, simply by the fact that he had not realized that dinner would be followed by communal singing around the table of polyphonic music from part books, a natural continuation of the *civil conversazione* already underway. But let us leave the miserable Philomathes sitting among the debris of this particular (abortive) act of musicking and the particular relationships and values it has celebrated, and move to another part of Elizabethan London where the same material furnishings – a dinner table and a set of part-books – help to construct an altogether happier example of domestic musical sociability, as revealed in the pages of another manual of self-improvement.

Claudius Hollybande's *The French Schoolemaister*, first published in 1573 and reissued many times over the following 100 years, proceeds, after a pronunciation guide, grammar and vocabulary, to its celebrated final section, a parallel-text phrasebook, English phrases printed on the left, French on the right, designed to get young English students who wish to learn French to practise using the language in real-life situations.¹⁷ Hundreds of short phrases are arranged in the form of 'family talks', illustrating scenes in a typical day of a London household. They include a chance encounter between two young friends outside St Paul's Cathedral, who discover that they have both been invited to dine at 'Maister Chauncelours of London'.

At the dinner table, an eclectic mixture of chatter about the day's news, mixed with discussion of the food and especially the wines, is interlaced with the host's commands to the servants, providing an unprecedented 'fly-on-the-wall' documentary of a family meal shared with friends. Once the dessert is on the table and the company pretty well oiled, the host suggests some music:

Roland, shall we have a song?

Yea Sir: where be your books of music? for they be the best corrected.

They be in my chest: Katherine, take the key of my closet – you shall find them in a little till at the left hand: behold, there be fair songs at four parts.

Who shall sing with me?

You shall have company enough: David shall make the bass, John the tenor, and James the treble.¹⁸

Among the interesting things to notice in this rare glimpse of spontaneous domestic music-making is the fact that the company will read their song (rather than singing it from memory); that the ‘songs at four parts’ are contained in plural ‘books’, which almost certainly means that they are a set of part books, with one for each singer. But because each singer can only see his own part and not that of the other singers as they would with a modern score, it is not at first obvious who should start:

Begin! James, take your tune! Go to: for what do you tarry?

I have but a rest.¹⁹

This little hiatus draws attention to the sheer fun of the exercise, similar to playing some sort of collaborative board game round the table, whose pleasure comes from the process of each participant correctly reading the signs and symbols on the page in order to produce the harmonious results of creating a part song together. There seems to be absolutely no sense here of a sudden change to a more serious register that might signal ‘performance’; rather, singing from the books simply runs directly on from the general bantering talk at the table. Instead of being a site of anxiety with the potential to produce nothing less than social humiliation, as in Philomathes’s experience, we see here how part book singing can engender a different sociability, creating the perfect ambience in which to enjoy relaxed bonhomie among friends:

Roland, drink afore you begin, you will sing with a better courage.

It is well said: give me some white wine – that will cause me to sing clearer.

Oh see what a fonell, for he hath powred a quarte of wine without anie takinge of his breath.

I should not bee a singing man except I drink well: and for fear we should have the throat dry, we wet the mouth often: and among us singers, we have a good recept for to be never dry.²⁰

Part books in practice

By the latter half of the sixteenth century, part books were for most professional musicians simply the most convenient means of conveying to them the minimum essential information that they each needed in order to execute their own part in a performance, and this has remained the case for orchestral and chamber music instrumentalists (although not, generally, singers) right up to the present day. For publishers (both scribes and printers) it was also the most economical way of transmitting notation to performers, requiring less paper – by far the most expensive element in the production of books in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries – than providing each participant with a complete score of all the music. It also had other advantages over score format, for example often eliminating the need for page turns within single pieces. Thus the part book was simply the every day tool of the working rank-and-file musician.²¹ As a rule, the best professional rank-and-file musicians who used part books for performances were expected not only to read their notated parts perfectly at sight, but also to modify them creatively in the very moment of performance, in sometimes highly sophisticated and genre-contingent ways in response to such signals as the words, melodic shapes, changes of harmony, and so on.²² The notation they had in their part-books needed on one hand to be comprehensive enough to allow for performance without further discussion, but on the other, to contain no more than was essential – normally restricted to words (where relevant), clefs, mensuration and proportion signs, note values and pitches, rests, repeat marks, etc.

Part-books present their own special challenges to sight-readers, even skilled professionals. For example, performers need to count rests absolutely correctly in order to come in at the right moment – in a live professional performance of complex and undirected ensemble music there is little or no room for errors of timing. They also need to listen acutely to the other musicians whose music they cannot see, continuously relating what they are hearing to what they are reading in their own part book in order to sense immediately if, for example, an approaching phrase of theirs turns out to be directly or partially imitative of a phrase just heard in another voice, and to respond accordingly.

What were essentially accidents of the pragmatics of part-book mechanics that professionals simply had to negotiate, could, however, become for amateur readers delightfully diverting challenges, such as the brief hiatus at the start of the song at Maister Chancellour's dinner party we witnessed earlier, where nobody knew which singer was supposed to start the

piece. It even seems possible that composers writing pieces aimed specifically at amateurs may have exploited this phenomenon, and deliberately contrived certain musical gestures within the music that were dependant on the exigencies of part-book format, in order to provide notational puzzles and challenges to test and amuse the collective 'players of the game'. In turn, the company would be able to experience collective satisfaction as they successfully negotiated the obstacles and overcame the pitfalls, achieving not only the solution of the 'puzzle', but realizing a delightful work of art in the process.²³

In this sense, collective sight-reading of ensemble music shares many of the generic features of Renaissance courtly game-playing; the main difference, however, is that successful madrigal-singing is collaborative rather than competitive, although it is still a pastime that requires skill and improves with practice.²⁴ Among other things, the exercise is predicated on a certain minimum level of musical literacy in each of the singers or players.²⁵ Without this basis, one would, like Philomathes, have been unable to participate directly in the game, and thus be marginalized or even excluded from the most intense experience of the particular kind of sociability that comes into operation for the duration of each act of musicking.

So, although music lovers presumably returned often to pieces they knew and liked, and quite likely would sometimes have worked away at them slowly, deciphering the notation and jointly correcting their errors, there must have been a particular pleasure in the very first encounter with a new song, and the immediate experience of finding one's own part fitting with the others to reveal the whole of a hitherto unknown piece. How might this have unfolded in practice?

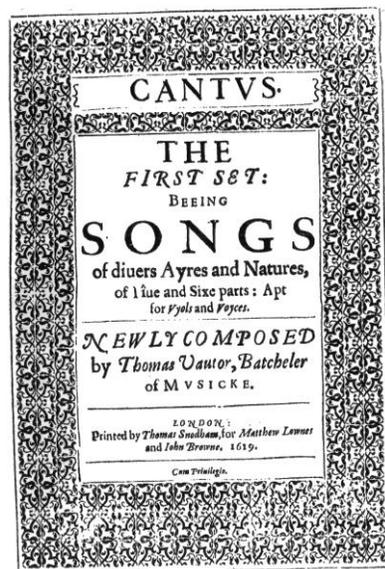


Fig 6: Title page of Thomas Vautor, *First Set of Songs of Divers Ayres and Natures of Five and Six Parts* (1619)

Figure 6 shows the title page of the Cantus, one of the set of ~~six~~-five parts books that make up Thomas Vautor's *First Set of Songs of Divers Ayres and Natures of Five and Six Parts*. Let us imagine that they have been fetched from the closet at the end of the evening meal, so that the family can enjoy reading one of the madrigals, and that the Cantus book is passed out to a female member of the company, or to a sufficiently literate child. The company decides to turn to madrigal number 12, which reveals a song of five parts that starts with the words 'Sweet Suffolke Owle' (Fig. 7)

Of 5. Voc. XII. CANTUS.

Weetsweet, sweet Suffolke Owle, sweet, sweet :||:
 to trimly dight, With feathers, like a Lady bright, sweet :||:
 fo :||: Thou sing'st alone, sitting, by night,
 Te whit, te whoo, te :||: te :||: te whit, te whoo, te whoo, te whit, te
 whoo te whit, te whit, te whit te whoo, Thy nose that forth so freely
 rouses, With shrill command the Moufe controules, with :||: And
 sings a dirge for dying soules, And sings a dirge, and :||: for dying soules, for
 :||: for :||: soules, soules, soules, Te whit, :||: te whoo, te whit te
 whoo te :||: te whit, :||: te whoo, :||: te whit te whoo, te :||:

Fig 7. No. XII: Thomas Vautor, 'Sweet Suffolke Owle', Cantus

Just as in a card game, what none of the individual participants can see is precisely what the others have in their own books; Figure 8, in which the opening gambits of each of the five voices are set out one above the other allows us, however, to enjoy a privileged view and to see everyone's 'hands' simultaneously.



Fig. 8: Thomas Vautor ‘Sweet Suffolk Owle’, opening

As ‘play’ begins, our Cantus singer needs to know enough of the rudiments of music to read the clef and time signature at the start and then to count the first rest of one semibreve length, sing the word ‘sweet’ for one semibreve, picking up the pitch of the note from the one who started the song (in this case, the one with the Quintus part – who may only have discovered that she has a solo on this first note when no-one else joins her). The Cantus must then count another semibreve and sing the next pitch a step up, and so on. If all the other parts manage as well as her, she will experience the delightful call and response that opens the madrigal; if not, then it will collapse, and the company will probably start again.

Once this first gambit has been enjoyed, Vautor provides a new test for his singers: at the words ‘So trimly dight, With feathers, like a lady bright’, there is suddenly a set of quicker notes to negotiate that approximate the natural rhythm of the words – again, something that will only become clear once the notes and the text have been read aloud together. Again, each singer gets a pleasant surprise to find that the others are chanting in exact homophonic coordination. And this can perhaps suggest to them all, at the repeat of the phrase, ~~perhaps~~ to risk pulling the tempo around slightly in order to get closer to speech-imitation – pushing it on, or holding back – but in any case, coordinating by subtle aural and visual cues that supersede the strict measure of the note values, in order to increase the pleasure of the rhetorical moment. A little further along,

each singer has to imitate the call of an owl: ‘Te whit, te whoo, te whit, te whoo’, and the challenge here may simply be to keep going without breaking down in laughter as each one has a go. Later comes a change to a slow triple time at the ‘dirge for dying soules’: can everyone understand the new mensuration sign and find the new tempo, or will the performance fall apart here? And so the ‘obstacle course’ unfolds.

These are moments of intimate interplay, prompted and articulated within an act of collective reading aloud in song. And, once again, it is the specific material format of the books that enable this, both in the form of musical texts as they are inscribed in a particular layout of signs and symbols on the page, and as physical objects that the musicians hold in their hands, structuring the sociability the singers simultaneously engender.

The activity of singing music and words from a set of part books represents, I would argue, one of the most sophisticated and complete examples of communal engagement with written text: quintessentially sociable, embodying the egalitarian ideals of civil conversation, both intellectually demanding and pleasurable, and productive of a delightful result that can only be achieved through coordinated endeavour. While it requires concentrated independent attention by each participant to the complexities of reading aloud – which in other circumstances is a highly individualistic practice – simultaneous reading from part books is intensely cooperative too. For what is being demanded of the participants here is of a far more elusive order than even a collective reading aloud of a non-musical text such as a play; indeed, there can be few varieties of structured social interaction so demanding and yet so satisfying as successful ensemble sight-singing, as anyone who has tried it may well agree.

¹ Roger Chartier, *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors and Libraries in Europe between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 8; originally published as *L'ordre des livres* (Aix-en-Provence: Alinéa, 1992).

² Roger Chartier, ‘Loisir et sociabilité: Lire à haute voix dans l’Europe moderne’, *Littératures classiques*, 12 (1990): 127–47; postscript, p. 147; transl. [\(without postscript\)](#) as ‘Leisure and Sociability: Reading Aloud in Early Modern Europe’, in Susan Zimmerman and Ronald F. E. Weissman, *Urban Life in the Renaissance* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1989), pp. 103–20 [\(without postscript\)](#).

³ See Paul Saenger, *Space between Words: the Origins of Silent Reading* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997) and idem, ‘Silent Reading: Its Impact on Late Medieval Script and Society’, *Viator*, 13 (1982): 367–414.

⁴ Roger Chartier, ‘The Practical Impact of Writing’, in Roger Chartier (ed.), *A History of Private Life*, Vol. III: *Passions of the Renaissance* (Cambridge, MA & London: Harvard, 1989), pp. 126–7.

⁵ Chartier, ‘Loisir et sociabilité’, p. 128 : ‘lire à haute voix n’est plus une nécessité pour le lecteur mais une pratique de sociabilité, aux circonstances et finalités multiples.’

⁶ Katherine Bergeron, ‘Elite Books, Popular Readers, and the Curious Hundred-Year History of the *Liber Usualis*’, in Kate Van Orden (ed.), *Music and the Cultures of Print* (New York: Garland, 2000), p. 42.

⁷ Carolyn Abbate, ‘Music, Drastic or Gnostic?’, *Critical Inquiry*, 30 (2004): 505–36.

⁸ Christopher Small, *Musicking*, (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan Press, 1994), p. ~~XX~~

⁹ Chartier, *The Order of Books*, p. 3.

¹⁰ See Marta Ajmar-Wollheim and Flora Denis (eds), *At Home in Renaissance Italy*, Exhibition Catalogue (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 2006) and especially the essay by Flora Denis, ‘Music’, pp. 228–43.

¹¹ Although Antico’s print does indeed present its contents of *frottole* in choir-book format that implies four-part *a-cappella* performance as depicted in the illustration, this does not necessarily represent the only means of realising the songs contained within the book, which are thought more typically to have been performed as solo songs for voice and lute or other stringed instrument(s). For varying views on the performance practice of the *Canzoni nove*, see Alfred Einstein, ‘Andrea Antico’s “Canzoni nove” of 1510’, *The Musical Quarterly*, 37 (1951): 330–39 and Alan Atlas, *Renaissance Music: Music in Western Europe 1400–1600* (New York & London: W. W. Norton, 1998), p. 353.

¹² A short verse printed beneath the image makes clear that they are performing four-part music:: ‘Gut Gesang habn wir hier notirt / Das in vier Stimm gesungen wirdt / Tenor / Discant / Alt und der Baß / Mit schön höfflichen Text dermaß / So lieblich zusammen concordirt / Und also uberflüß sonirt / Daß sich ein Herz erhebt dar von / Das Gesang erfund Amphion.’ [We have a good song written here to be sung in four parts, Tenor, Discant, Altus and the Bass, with fine courtly text so sweetly blended together and so exuberantly sounded that it lifts up your heart. Singing was invented by Amphion].

¹³ Laura Macy, ‘Speaking of Sex: Metaphor and Performance in the Italian Madrigal’, *The Journal of Musicology*, 14 (1996): 1–34, highlights the potential for particularly intense yet carefully controlled social intimacy in such situations in her clever analysis of an imagined performance of Aracdel’s ‘Il bianco e dolce cigno’. She suggests how a ‘mixed’ group of madrigal singers ‘in their small, physically proximate, circle’ are licensed ‘to recite wanton words in a context of musical friction’: a potentially

‘dangerous’ situation, which is nevertheless rendered ‘safe’ by virtue of the humorous close of the piece that ‘contains the sexual discourse within the boundaries of the moment’ (25).

¹⁴ Sophie Join-Lambert and Maxime Préaud, *Abraham Bosse: savant graveur, Tours, vers 1604–1676*, Exhibition Catalogue (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France; Tours: Musée des beaux arts, Tours, 2004), pp. 192–3.

¹⁵ Thomas Morely, *A Plaine and Easie Introduction to Practicall Musicke* (London: Peter Short, 1597) ed. R. Alec Harman (London: J. M. Dent, 1952), p. 9. Polymathes’ ‘lucky escape’ occurs because the other guests assume that he is only feigning ignorance of music, whereas the truth of the matter is that he really *is* ignorant, and they merely accuse him of ‘discourtesy’ (?false modesty): ‘Among the rest of the guests, by chance master Aphron came thither also, who, falling to discourse of music, was in an argument hotly pursued by Eudoxus and Calergus ... as in his own art he was overthrown; but he still sticking to his opinion., the two gentlemen requested me to examine his reasons and confute them; bit I refusing and pretending [i.e. claiming] ignorance, the whole company condemned me of discourtesy, being fully persuaded that I had been as skilful in that art as they took me to be learned in others.’

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Claudius Hollybande, *The French Schoolemaister* (London: William Howe, for Abraham Weale, 1573).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 126–8.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

²⁰ *Ibid.* Probably the best-known example of the literary representation of part-book singing interspersed with *conversazione* is Antonfrancesco Doni’s *Dialogo della musica* (Venice: Scotto, 1544), a collection of miscellaneous madrigals issued as a set of part books, of which the Cantus book also contains the ‘script’ of the conversations enjoyed by the participants between performances of the pieces; modern edition: Anna Maria Monterosso Vacchelli (ed.), *L’opera musicale di Antonfrancesco Doni* (Cremona: Athenaeum Cremonese, 1969).

²¹ The main exception to this was the continued use of large choir-books for polyphonic music in some ecclesiastical situations well into the seventeenth century. But again, this was primarily pragmatic: as long as the entire choir stood in front of a single lectern to perform, a choirbook allowed them to remain in very close contact with one another and for more than one singer to perform the same part. Each vocal part however, remained separate on the page, rather than in score format where they are aligned above each other and require a different set of reading skills which modern choir singers, for example, take for granted. However, as soon as the music for sixteenth century singers and instrumentalists requires them to be physically divided up, or a single collection contains a variety of pieces for different combinations and

numbers of voices, part-book format quickly proves to be both the more practical and the more economical format.

²² See Richard Wistreich, 'High, Middle and Low: Singing Monteverdi', in Johannes Boer, Margaret Murata and Dinko Fabris (eds), *'Passaggio in Italia': Proceedings of the International Symposium, Utrecht, 2006* (Turnhout: Brepols, forthcoming).

²³ For a wide-ranging survey and discussion of some quite sophisticated musical games and their role in late sixteenth-century Italian courtly society, see Laurie Stras, "'Al gioco si conosce il galantuomo": Artifice, Humour and Play in the *Enigma musicali* of Lodovico Agostino', *Early Music History*, 24 (2005): 213–86.

²⁴ The literature of game playing, particularly as a feature of courtly sociability, is a large one. For an interesting recent treatment, see George W. McClure, 'Women and the Politics of Play in Sixteenth-Century Italy: Torquato Tasso's Theory of Games', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 61 (2008): 750–791.

²⁵ Although, as Kate Van Orden's essay in this Journal makes clear, it is still possible to participate in note-based music-making with even quite rudimentary skills, and musical literacy, just as word-reading literacy, must have ranged across a wide spectrum of ability levels in the early modern period.